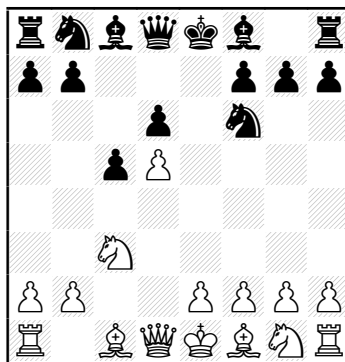


# Benoni [A60–67, A70–79]

*Written by GM John Emms*

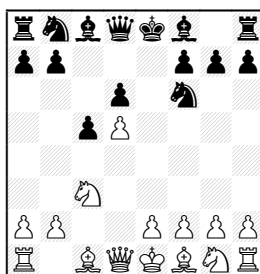


Welcome to the Modern Benoni, one of the most dynamic and uncompromising defences to 1 d4. As Israeli Grandmaster and Benoni Expert Lev Psakhis pointed out " This is definitely not an opening for cowards". The Modern Benoni is for those who like to live life dangerously. A favourite of the attacking legend Mikhail Tal, the Modern Benoni player accepts positional weaknesses for the kind of activity a stodgy defence can only dream about. However, if White players can keep everything under control, then he can look forward to reaping the benefits of a super-solid centre and the transparent weakness of Black's dodgy d6-pawn.

All the games given in [blue](#) can be accessed via ChessPub.exe, simply head for their respective ECO code.

# Contents

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♗c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6

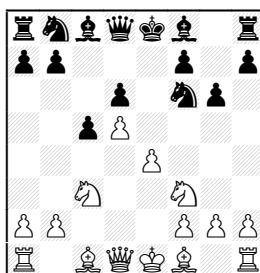


5...♙d6 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 –Various [A60]

6 e4

6 ♗f3 g6 7 g3 (7 ♗d2 Benoni–6 Nf3 g6 7 Nd2– [A61]; 7 h3 Benoni–6 Nf3 g6 7 h3 and other moves– [A61]) 7...♙g7 8 ♙g2 0-0 9 0-0 a6 (9...♞e8 Benoni Fianchetto–9...Re8– [A62]) 9...♗a6 Benoni Fianchetto–9...Na6– [A62]) 10 a4 ♗bd7 11 ♗d2 (11 ♙f4 ♞e7 12 h3 Benoni Fianchetto–9...a6 10 a4 Nbd7 11 Bf4– [A63]) 11...♞e8 12 h3 Benoni Fianchetto–11 Nd2 Main Line– [A64]

6...g6 7 ♗f3



7 f4 ♙g7 8 ♙b5+ (8 e5 Benoni: Mikenas Attack–6 e4 g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 e5!?!– [A66]) 8...♗fd7 (8...♗bd7 9 e5 Benoni: Flick–Knife Attack–8 Bb5+ Nbd7/Bd7– [A67]) 9 a4 0-0 10 ♗f3 Benoni: Flick–Knife Attack–8 Bb5+ Nfd7– [A67]

7 ♕d3 ♕g7 8 ♖gc2 Benoni: 6 e4 g6– [A65]

**7...♕g7**

7...a6 Benoni: Modern Classical–7 Nf3 a6!?!– [A70]

**8 ♕e2**

8 h3 0-0 9 ♕d3 b5 (9...a6 10 a4 ♖bd7 Benoni: Modern Classical–9 Bd3 a6 and others– [A70])

10 ♕xb5 (10 ♖xb5 Benoni: Modern Classical–9 Bd3 b5 10 Nxb5– [A70]) 10...♖xe4

11 ♖xe4 ♖a5+ Benoni: Modern Classical–9 Bd3 b5 10 Bxb5– [A70]

**8...0-0 9 0-0 ♖e8**

9...a6 10 a4 ♕g4 Benoni: Old Classical–9...a6 10 a4 Bg4– [A75]

9...♖a6 Benoni: Old Classical–9...Na6 and others– [A73]

**10 ♖d2 ♖a6**

10...♖bd7 11 a4 g5 12 ♖c2 Benoni: Old Classical–9...Re8 10 Nd2 Nbd7– [A77]

**11 f3**

11 ♖e1 ♖c7 12 a4 b6 13 ♖c2 Benoni: Old Classical–9...Re8 10 Nd2 Na6– [A78]

**11...♖c7 12 a4 b6**

Benoni: Old Classical–9...Re8 10 Nd2 Na6 11 f3– [A79]

*Press F5 to toggle the Navigation Pane, then click on the appropriate bookmark to go straight to that section.*

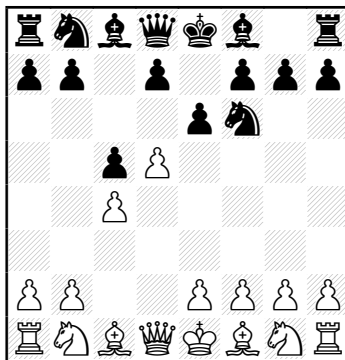
*Ctrl + 2 resizes the page.*

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# 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 – Various [A60]

Last updated: 14/01/02 by John Emms

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6



4 Nc3

4 g3 exd5 5 cxd5 b5 6 Qg2 d6 7 b4 The main idea behind this move (which has in fact been played in other games before) is that if Black now captures the b4-pawn, then White will get tremendous compensation in future by placing his c1-bishop actively at b2, and manoeuvring a knight to d4 from where it may later jump further to c6 or f5, for example. 7...Nbd7 8 bxc5 dxc5 9 Nh3 (After 9 d6 Bb8, White's d6-pawn would soon find itself under fire and without adequate support to survive.) 9...Qd6 Kasimdzhanov,R–Kasparov,G/Batumi, Georgia 2001.

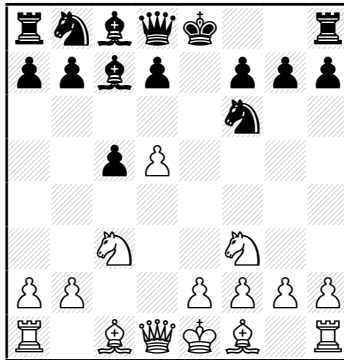
4...exd5 5 cxd5 Qd6

5...d6 6 Nf3 Qa5!? Preparing ...b7–b5. 7 g3 (7 a4 then 7...b5 anyway! Both the a4-pawn and the knight on c3 are pinned.) 7...b5 Black has achieved the desired ...b7–b5 and has a very playable position: Agdestein,S–Forintos,G/Esbjerg 1983.

6 Nf3

6 e4 Qc7? 7 d6 Qa5 Van Gisbergen,S–Lupu,S/Cappelle la Grande Open 1994.

6...Qc7



7 ♖g5

This unpretentious move seem to be a popular choice nowadays. White refrains from trying to blow Black off the board and instead adopts a sensible approach of development.

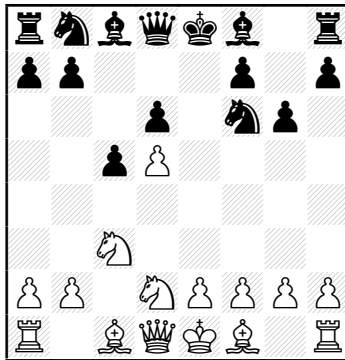
7...d6 8 e3 0-0 9 ♗e2 a6 10 a4

Tkachiev,V–Savchenko,S/Cannes FRA 2000.

# Benoni – 6 Nf3 g6 7 Nd2 [A61]

*Last updated: 19/03/04 by John Emms*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♗c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 ♗d2**



Introduces the "Knight's Tour Variation". The f3–knight heads immediately for its favourite c4 square, where it keeps a watchful eye on Black's weak d6–pawn.

**7...♗g7 8 ♗c4 0-0 9 ♗g5**

9 g3!/? This is the latest wrinkle in this line. Formerly the direct 9 Bf4 or 9 Bg5 have been more popular. The idea of 9 g3 is to try and transpose to a favourable version of the Fianchetto Variation, without allowing Black the option of opposing knights with ...Nd7–e5/b6: [Sadler,M–Ward,C/ Nottingham 1996](#).

It's important to compare our main line with the variation 9 Bf4 b6 as the only difference is the positioning of Black's h–pawn. In most cases this shouldn't make much difference to the assessments. 9 ♗f4 b6 10 ♗xd6 ♖e8 11 ♗g3 ♗e4 12 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 13 e3 b5 14 ♗d6 (14 ♗d2 ♖b4 15 b3 c4 16 ♖c1 c3 17 ♗f3 ♗a5 18 ♗d3 ♗xa2 19 0-0 ♗g4 was unclear in Meduna,E–Nunn,J /Biel 1982.) 14...♖b4

a) 15 ♗c2 ♖xb2 (15... ♗xb2!/? compare with below) 16 0-0 ♗a6 17 a4 bxa4 18 ♗xa6 ♗xa6 19 ♖xa4 with an edge to White (stronger pawns) in Garcia Ilundain,D–Spraggett,K /Ampuriabrava 1997.

b) 15 ♗xb5!/? 15...♗f8 16 ♗c6 ♗a6 17 ♗d2 (17 ♗xa8 ♖xb2 18 ♗a4 ♗f6 and White was in big trouble in the game Donner,J–Planinec,A /Wijk aan Zee 1973. The game ended 19 ♖c1 ♗xd6 20 f4 ♗f5 21 e4 ♖e2+ 22 ♗d1 ♗h5 and White threw in the towel.) 17...♗xc6 18 dxc6 ♗f6 19 ♗c3 ♗e6 20 ♖d1 is unclear – Kapengut

## 9...h6

The most popular move although, in my opinion, not the best.

9...♖a6! Not mentioned by ECO, but I find this move to be very logical against White's set-up. The knight will come to c7 and Black will then follow up with ...b7-b6 and ...Ba6, hitting the knight on c4. 10 e3 (10 e4 ♗c7 11 a4 ♜e8! is a little awkward for White, as 12 ♕d3 can be answered by 12...♗xe4!) 10...♗c7 11 a4 b6 12 ♕e2 ♕a6 13 0-0 [Delfs,G-Grigoriev,V/ correspondence 1996](#).

I should also mention 9...♞e7 which looks good enough for equality: 10 ♞d2 (or 10 e3 ♗bd7 followed by ...Ne5) 10...b6! 11 ♞f4!? ♜d8 12 f3 (12 0-0-0 ♕a6 13 e4 ♕xc4 14 ♕xc4 a6 15 ♞h4 ♗bd7 16 ♜he1 ♞f8 17 ♖b1 b5 was better for Black in Portisch,L-Horvath,T, Hungary 1984. 12 ♗e4 ♞xe4 13 ♞xe4 ♗xe4 14 ♕xd8 b5 15 f3 bxc4 16 fxe4 ♕xb2 17 ♜b1 c3 18 ♕g5 ♗d7 19 ♕c1 ♗f6 (Schneider) and now 20 ♕xb2 is met by 20...♜b8! 12 ♗b5!? looks interesting.) 12...♕a6 13 e4 b5 14 ♗d2 b4 15 ♗d1 h6 16 ♕xf6 ♕xf6 17 ♞e3 ♕xf1 18 ♖xf1 ♗d7 19 ♗c4 ♗e5 and Black was fine in Eliet,N-Kinsman,A, Toulouse 1996.

## 10 ♕f4

Of course, 10 Bh4 is a perfectly reasonable alternative, but in my opinion 10 Bf4 is much more worrying for the Benoni player.

10 ♕h4 ♗a6 11 e3 ♗c7 12 a4 b6 13 ♕e2 ♕a6, as given by ECO, looks like a reasonable way to play for Black.

## 10...b6

I will concentrate on the main line, in which Black sacrifices his d-pawn. Other ways for Black to sacrifice include 10...Na6 and 10...Nbd7, but neither look sound (see the analysis below).

10...♗e8 is the only move to play if Black doesn't want to sacrifice on d6, but now the inclusion of ...h7-h6 works in White's favour: 11 ♞c1 g5 12 ♕d2 and White will follow up with an early h2-h4. This all looks rather uncomfortable for Black.

10...♗bd7 11 ♞d2! (I haven't seen any examples of this move but it looks rather awkward for Black – in most case Qd2 will be a more useful move than ...Kh7 or ...g6-g5) 11...g5 12 ♕xd6 ♜e8 13 e3 ♗e4 14 ♗xe4 ♞xe4 15 ♕g3 and it's difficult to see any compensation for Black here.

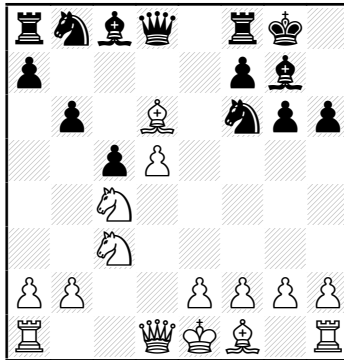
10...♗a6 is found to be wanting by some analysis by John Watson in 'The Gambit Guide to the Modern Benoni'. 11 ♞d2 b5 12 ♗xd6! (12 ♗xb5 ♗e4 was unclear in Kaplun,L-Kapengut,A /USSR 1980.)

a) 12...♗h5 13 ♗dxb5

b) 12...♕d7 13 e3 (or 13 e4)

c) 12...b4 13 ♗cb5 ♕d7 (13...g5 14 ♕g3 ♗h5 15 ♗xc8 ♗xg3 16 hxg3 ♞xc8 17 e3) 14 e4! This all look very convincing from White's point of view.

## 11 ♕xd6



11 ♖xd6? ♗h5! is fine for Black.

11 ♜d2 is also possible here, after which Black should play 11...♙a6 12 ♖xd6 ♗h5 (threatening ...g6-g5) with some compensation for the pawn.

**11...♞e8**

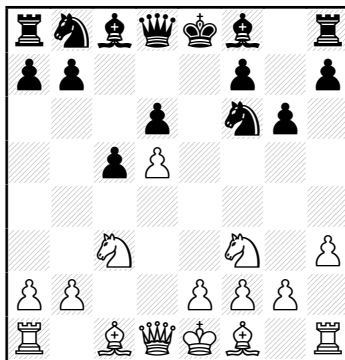
Arlandi,E–Franco Ocampos,Z/Torino 1983.



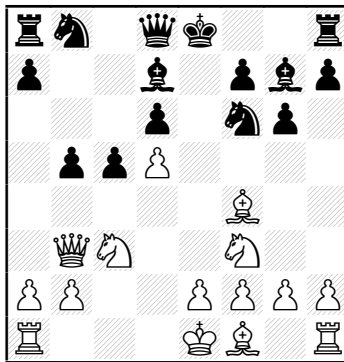
# Benoni – 6 Nf3 g6 7 h3 & others [A61]

Last updated: 12/10/03 by John Emms

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 h3

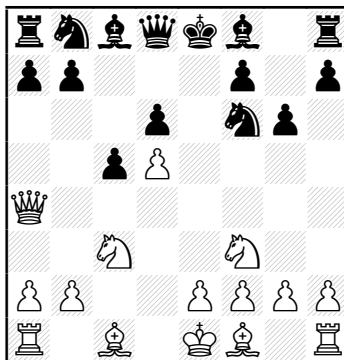


The idea behind the sneaky 7 h3 is to answer the natural developing move 7...Bg7 with 8 e4!, transposing into the Modern Classical Variation, without allowing ...Bg4 ideas. 7 ♗f4 ♗g7 (7...a6!? 8 e4 transposes to ECO code [A70].) (Black's main line is 7...a6 see [Pert,N–Emms,J/British Championship 2001](#) (ECO code A70)) 8 ♜a4+! This is the critical way to test Black's set-up. Of course White has other moves, including 8 e4, but then Black would be able to smoothly finish his development. (8 e3 is not particularly threatening – see [Azmaiparashvili,Z–Anand,V/Dubai UAE 2002](#)) 8...♗d7 (For the imaginative 8...♘f8!? see the game [Damaso–Bu Xiangzhi/Lisbon 2000](#).) 9 ♜b3 b5!



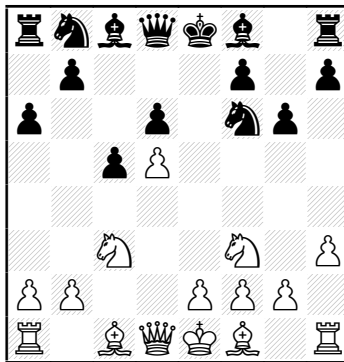
This pawn sacrifice is much more popular than either 9...Qc7 or the retreat 9...Bc8, both of which leave White with a comfortable edge. 10 ♖xb5 White should take one pawn, but which one? With results going so well for Black in this line I predict a resurrection of the other pawn grab. (10 ♙xd6 10... ♗b6 11 ♙e5 0-0 12 e3 c4 13 ♗d1 ♘a6 It's believed that Black has just enough counterplay for the pawn, but this line could certainly do with a few more practical tests. 14 a4!? Yakovich, Y–Handke, F/Stockholm SWE 2000.) 10...♙xb5 11 ♗xb5+ ♘bd7 Kalantarian, N–Horvath, T/Budapest 1996.

7 ♗a4+



White's idea is to disrupt Black's normal development with this check coupled with a quick attack on the d6–pawn with Bf4. This move has only cropped up in the last few years and after some initial success for White the signs are that Black players are coming to grips with it. 7...♗bd7 This certainly looks the most natural way to block the check. (7... ♗d7 8 ♗h4 ♙g7 9 ♙h6 Nikolic, P–Tindall, B/Surfers Paradise AUS 2000.) 8 ♙f4 a6 9 e4 ♗b8 10 ♗c2 (10 e5 b5 11 ♗c2 dxe5 12 ♘xe5 ♘xe5 13 ♙xe5 ♙d6 – see Kogan, A–Jenal, J/Zurich 2001) 10...b5 11 ♙e2 ♗c7 12 ♘d2 ♙g7 13 a4 b4 14 ♘d1 0-0 – see Levin, F–Dambacher, M/Dieren 2003.

7...a6



## 8 a4

Once again White prepares to meet 8...Bg7 with 9 e4.

8 e4 transposes to the Modern Classical Variation (see ECO code [A70])

There is only one way for Black to attempt to punish White for this move order and that is to play...

## 8...♕e7

This move is aimed at preventing the e2–e4 advance. It's true that the queen is committed to the e7–square rather early.

## 9 ♖g5

9 Bf4, 9 Nd2 and 9 g3 are all possible, but pinning the knight is the most common move.

9 ♖a3!?, intending e2–e4, [Labollita,M–Rosito,J/Mar del Plata ARG 2000](#)

9 ♘d2 ♘bd7 10 e4 ♗h6!? – see [Timon Piote,S–Kovacevic,S/Madrid 2003](#).

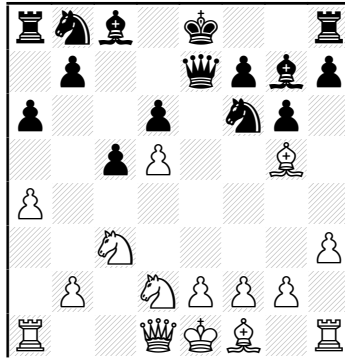
## 9...♗g7

Black can also opt to develop his b8–knight first with 9...♘bd7 although this often just transposes. 10 e3 h6 11 ♗h4

a) 11...♗g7 12 ♗d3!? White normally plays either 12 Be2 or 12 Nd2 here. Now Black has the option of exchanging a minor piece. 12...0-0 (12...♘e5 13 ♘xe5 ♗xe5 14 0-0 0-0 15 e4 ♘h5 looks okay for Black. In general the exchange of one pair of minor pieces favours Black, who has less space for his pieces.) 13 0-0 [Bellon Lopez,J–Suba,M/Malaga ESP 2001](#).

b) 11...♘e5 12 ♘xe5 This, combined with White's next move, is a powerful novelty which asks questions about Black's move order. Normally Black is happy to exchange a pair of knights in order to ease piece congestion, but here White has a very specific idea in mind. 12...♗xe5 13 ♗b3! see [Wells,P–Emms,J/Torquay 2002](#).

10  $\text{N}d2$



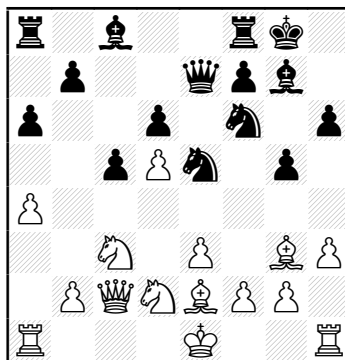
10...  $\text{N}bd7$

Black can play the tricky 10...  $\text{Q}e5!$ ? here, when best for White is probably to repeat with 11  $\text{N}f3$   $\text{Q}e7$  and then play 12 e3 and 13 Nd2

11 e3 h6 12  $\text{Q}h4$  g5 13  $\text{Q}g3$   $\text{N}e5$  14  $\text{Q}e2$  0-0

14...  $\text{Q}f5$  may be more accurate, as it prevents White's next move. Then after

15  $\text{Q}c2!$

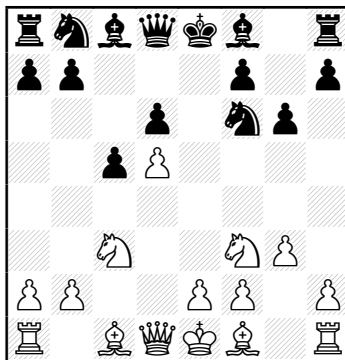


I like this move, which takes control of the crucial b1-h7 diagonal and leaves Black with plenty of opening problems to solve: [Chernin,A-Milov,V/Biel 1994](#).

# Benoni Fianchetto – 9...Na6 [A62]

*Last updated: 29/07/03 by John Emms*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 g3**



The Fianchetto Variation is a quieter system which remains prominent as it can be reached by a King's Indian move order. It's hardly the main test of the Modern Benoni, but it still demands respect.

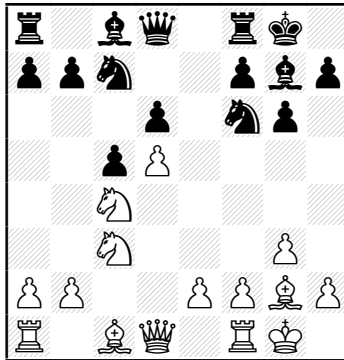
**7...♗g7 8 ♗g2 0-0 9 0-0 ♘a6**

This move, a favourite of the Romanian Grandmaster Mihail Suba, has never enjoyed the same popularity as ideas with ...Re8 and ... Nbd7. Black doesn't really achieve the same level of counterplay. In my opinion the best plan is the immediate Nf3–d2–c4. This causes Black real problems and was the main reason why I gave up 9...Na6

**10 ♘d2**

10 ♗f4 is less critical: 10...♘c7 11 a4 ♖e8 12 ♖e1 ♘e4! is comfortable for Black – see [Micic,C–Grigoriants,S/Pancevo 2003](#).

**10...♘c7 11 ♘c4**



**11...♖fe8**

11...♖e8!? The point of Black's last move is that the d6-pawn can now be protected by the Benoni bishop. However, doesn't the bishop deserve a more glamorous life than protecting a weak pawn! 12 ♔f4 ♕f8 [Stempin,P-Rydzik,K/Suwalki POL 1999](#)

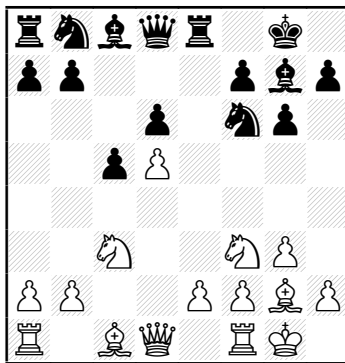
**12 a4 b6 13 ♔d2!?**

Preparing b2-b3 and keeping an eye on the d5-pawn: [Arkell,K-Rayner,F/Dublin 1993](#).

# Benoni Fianchetto – 9...Re8 [A62]

Last updated: 27/01/03 by John Emms

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 g3 ♗g7 8 ♗g2 0-0  
9 0-0 ♜e8



This can often transpose to the main line of the Fianchetto, but there are independent variations too.

## 10 ♗f4

Many White players prefer the plan of Nf3–d2–c4, but Nikolic prefers to keep his knight on f3 and play Bc1-f4.

10 h3 The idea of h2–h3 is simply to prevent a black piece coming to g4. 10...♘a6 11 ♘d2 ♘c7 12 a4 b6 [Chernin,A–Hertneck,G/Gleisdorf AUT 2000](#).

10 ♘d2 ♘a6!/? More normal for Black here is 10...a6 11 a4 Nbd7, transposing to ECO code [A64]. 11 ♘c4 ♘c7 12 ♗f4 ♗f8 13 e4?! (Stronger is 13 a4! [Stempin,P–Rydzik,K/Suwalki 1999](#). After the text move Black is allowed to expand on the queenside in typical Benoni fashion.) 13...b5! [Llorens,I–Short,P/Bunratty IRL 2001](#).

10 ♗g5 h6 (Perhaps the reason that 10 Bg5 is not seen very often is that it fails to put any immediate pressure on d6, so Black is able to develop his b8–knight with no problem: 10...a6 11 a4 ♘bd7! 12 ♘d2 (to play Nc4) 12...h6 13 ♗f4 ♘e5! looks very okay for Black, who is threatening to chase the bishop with ... Nh5 and ...Ng4.) 11 ♗f4 ♘e4 12 ♘xe4 ♗xe4 13 ♘d2 ♗b4 14 a3 ♗xf4 15 gxf4 ♗xb2 16 ♗b1 ♗g7 and the insertion of ...h7–h6 helps White slightly as Black no longer has the option of ...Bh6.

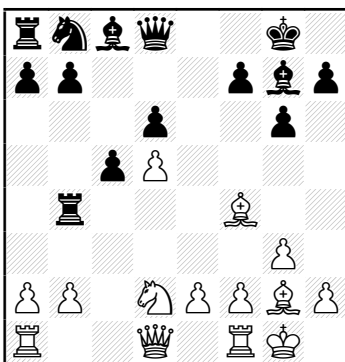
Still, this is not a big deal and I still suspect that Black has enough for the small material disadvantage.

### 10...♞e4!?

In general the exchange of knights helps to ease Black's position. The long diagonal is opened and exchanges usually help the side with less space. However, play becomes quite forcing due to the weaknesses on b2 and d6. ECO considers 10...Na6 and 10...Nh5 as the main lines here.

10...a6 11 a4 ♞e4 12 ♞xe4 ♞xe4 13 ♞d2 ♞b4 14 ♞a2! and White was better – see the game [Nikolic,P–Hracek,Z/Batumi 1999](#) in ChessPub. By the way, Nikolic is probably the world's leading exponent on the g3 Benoni and has very good results with it.

### 11 ♞xe4 ♞xe4 12 ♞d2 ♞b4



12...♞xf4 13 gxf4 ♙xb2 14 ♞b1 ♙g7 is possible and playable, but is probably less accurate than the text. White's rook is more favourably placed on b1 than a2. On the other hand, at least this way Black rules out ideas of 13 Rb1 and 13 b3.

### 13 a3

I think it's here that White should be looking for something more testing:

13 ♞b1 g5! (13...♞xb2 14 ♞xb2 ♙xb2 15 ♞c4 is good for White – the crucial d6–pawn drops 13...♙xb2 14 ♞c2 ♙g7 15 ♞xb4 cxb4 16 ♞c4 is also unpleasant for Black: 16...♙f8 17 ♞xd6!) 14 ♙e3 ♙f5 15 a3 ♞xb2 16 ♞xb2 ♙xb2 17 ♞c4!?! (17 ♞b3 ♙f6 18 ♞xb7 ♞d7 19 ♞c4 ♞b6 was more than okay for Black in Ligterink–Tindall, Hoogeveen 1998.) 17...h6 18 ♞b3 ♙xe4 19 ♙xe4 ♙d4! 20 ♙xd4 cxd4 21 ♞xb7 ♞d7 22 ♞b4 ♞f6 23 ♞d1 ♞b8 24 ♞xd4 ♞xd4 25 ♞xd4 ♞b3 26 ♞d3 ♞b2= and Black has enough compensation for the pawn – White's bishop is bad and the knight has a nice home on c5, Kaidanov–Norwood, Florida 1993. Probably the correct result is a draw.

13 b3! looks critical and is certainly the most dangerous try. Black can win the exchange but in doing so he gives up the dark squares and what exactly is the rook doing on b4? 13...♙xa1 14 ♞xa1 ♞xf4!?! Giving back the exchange is probably the best



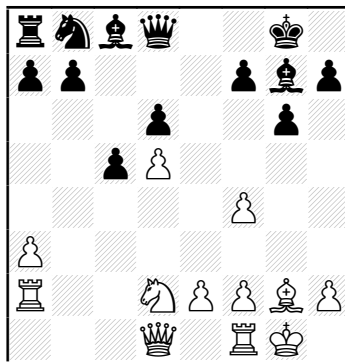
practical decision – the black rook sacrifices itself while there is still the chance to recover something. (The variations 14...g5 15 ♕e3 f5 16 ♖c4 b5 17 ♖a3 f4 18 ♕d2 a5 19 ♖c2

and 14...♕f5 15 ♖c4 b5 16 a3! ♜xb3 17 ♕h6 f6 18 ♖d2± (Stohl) show how the rook can fall for even less material. In both cases Black will eventually have big problems with the weaknesses on the kingside.) 15 gxf4 ♖d7 16 ♗c3 ♖f6 17 b4! cxb4 18 ♗xb4 ♕g4 19 e3± and White was a little better in Haba–Schandorff, Germany 2002 – Black's pawn on d6 is a bit vulnerable.

**13...♜xf4 14 gxf4 ♕xb2 15 ♜a2**

Now 15 ♜b1 is simply answered by 15...♕xa3±

**15...♕g7**



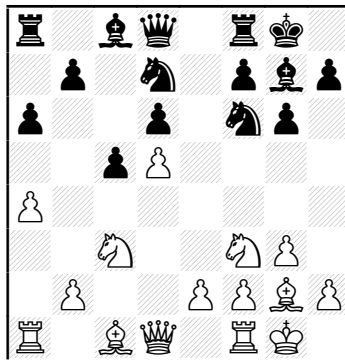
Benoni Fianchetto–9...Re8 10 Bf4 Ne4/Survey.

# Benoni Fianchetto – 9...a6 10 a4 Nbd7. 11

## Bf4 [A63]

*Last updated: 14/01/02 by John Emms*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 g3 ♙g7 8 ♙g2 0-0  
9 0-0 a6 10 a4 ♘bd7



### 11 ♙f4

11 Bf4 is White main alternative to 11 Nd2. White plans immediate pressure in the centre with Re1 and e2–e4

### 11...♙e7

11...♙c7

a) 12 ♖c1 12...♘h5 Immediately asking the question to the bishop on f4. This could well be an important wrinkle in this line: [Drasko,M–Velimirovic,D/Subotica YUG 2000 \(12...♙e8 13 h3 : Sherbakov,R–Kovacevic,A/Belgrade YUG 2000\)](#)

b) 12 a5 For 12...♙e8 13 ♙a4 An interesting idea – White's queen plans to travel to the kingside. Unfortunately this plan is flawed

White should probably concentrate on playing on the other wing: [Kachiani,K–Meissner,B/Tegernsee GER 2001.](#)

## 12 h3

Preventing ...Ng4: Schulte,O–Lautier,J/ Hamburg 1986.

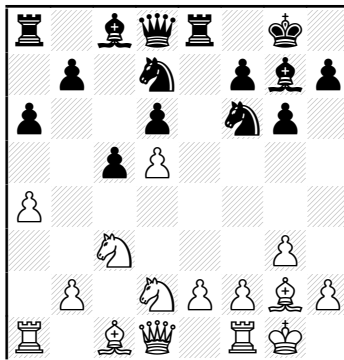
12 ♔d2 allows 12...♘g4 : Arkell,K–Kisman,A/British League 1999.

# Benoni Fianchetto – 11 Nd2 Main Line

[A64]

Last updated: 16/01/04 by John Emms

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 ♘f3 g6 7 g3 ♙g7 8 ♙g2 0-0  
9 0-0 a6 10 a4 ♘bd7 11 ♘d2 ♜e8



## 12 h3

This is the main line of the Fianchetto Benoni.

12 ♘c4 The main alternative to 12 h3. This line is can be quieter for both sides, but on the other hand, there can also be plenty of fireworks. 12...♘e5 Again this is the most active continuation, although 12...Nb6 is also fully playable.

a) 13 ♘a3!? Keeping the pieces on the board. 13...♘h5 14 ♜e1 (*14 h3?! f5 15 ♜b1 ♙d7 16 ♙d2 g5 is good for Black – see Delemarre,J–Stellwagen,D/Leeuwarden 2003.*) 14...f5 15 f4 ♘f7 see [Bukal,V–Lalic,B/Pula 1999](#)

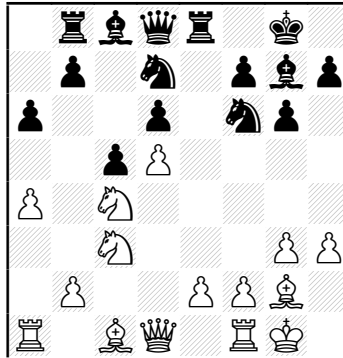
b) 13 ♘xe5 13...♞xe5 14 ♙f4 [Arkell,K–Plaskett,J/Hastings 1996](#).

12 ♜a2 is an unassuming move, with the simple idea of moving the rook off the long diagonal in order to avoid tactical tricks later on. Overall this move shouldn't be too much of a threat for Black. 12...♞b8 [Soppe,G–Rosito,J/Buenos Aires ARG 2000](#).

## 12...♞b8

With this move We are now entering one of the most critical lines of the whole Benoni.

### 13 ♖c4



### 13...♖e5

It's a straight choice between this move and the safer 13...Nb6. Most Benoni players prefer the fireworks which 13...Ne5 creates.

13...♖b6 this is Black's safer option. 14 ♖a3 ♘d7 15 e4 (15 ♙f4?! [Seres,L–Gheorghiu,F/Fribourg SUI 2000.](#)) 15...♖c8 16 ♗d3 ♗c7 17 ♙e3 ♖a7 18 ♖c4!? see [Zoler,D–Bar,R/Tel Aviv 2002.](#)

### 14 ♖a3

The critical line. Instead of exchanging knights, White keeps them on the board, hoping to gain time in the centre with a timely f2–f4.

14 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 is meant to be quite harmless.

### 14...♙d7!?

This move was first played by the English GM David Norwood, back in the 80s, and it's now becoming mainline theory. The story behind Norwood's choice is quite amusing. The story behind this invention should have been that the young English player had been inspired by the Korchnoi–Kasparov encounter. However, Norwood had never seen this game. All he knew about the position was that Black was supposed to sacrifice a piece. So he then scoured the whole board until he could find a way to way to do so and there is no clearer way than with 14...Bd7!?

14...♖h5 15 e4 (15 ♖h2 White defends the g–pawn in preparation of f2–f4. 15...♙d7!? Encouraging White to win the piece with f2–f4. With play on both sides of the board, Black feels he will have enough compensation. 16 a5!? White gives up a pawn in order to forestall Black's queenside play. 16...♗xa5 – see [Kiseleva,N–Handke,F/Isle of Man 2003.](#)) 15...♗f8 I think it was Timman who first came up with

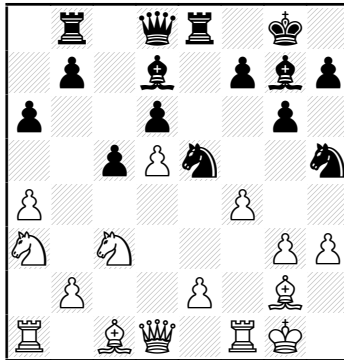
this move, preparing ...f7–f5, many years ago. The final word seemed to follow a famous old Korchnoi–Kasparov encounter. Even though Kasparov won brilliantly, later analysis cast doubt on Black's idea. (15...♙d7 16 g4 ♘f6 17 g5 ♘h5 18 f4 b5 – see [Jirka,J–Simacek,P/Cartak 2003](#)) 16 ♔h2! f5 17 f4 b5 Black has to go all in. 18 axb5 (18 fxe5 ♘xg3! 19 ♔xg3 ♙xe5+ 20 ♔f2 ♚h4+ which gives Black a strong attack.) 18...axb5 19 ♘axb5! (19 fxe5?! 19... ♘xg3! [Van Wely,L–Timman,J/Wijk aan Zee NED 2002.](#)) 19...fxe4 20 ♙xe4 ♙d7 21 ♚e2 ♚b6 22 ♘a3 ♜be8 was [Korchnoi,V–Kasparov,G/Lucerne 1982.](#)

## 15 f4

It seems wise to accept the offer.

15 e4? White should grab the offer of the piece, as Black gets loads of counterplay in any case: [Kemp,P–Ward,C/British Championship 2000.](#)

## 15...♘h5



## 16 fxe5

16 ♔h2?! [Safin,S–Kotsur,P/Dubai 2001.](#)

## 16...♙xe5

So what does Black have in return for the sacrificed piece? Well the initial answer would be "not much, apart from a pawn", but as you look more closely at the position, you see that it's not so easy for White to consolidate. The g3–pawn is under attack and White's kingside has been weakened. Black's pieces are well placed and there is play on both sides of the board. Meanwhile White has trouble getting his knights into the game. So does Black have enough? Well the theoretical answer is probably "no" but on the other hand, no–one has come up with a convincing refutation yet, and this line is now fifteen years old. This is certainly a future debating point!

**17 ♗f4!?**

17 g4 ♗g3 18 ♖c4? [Saeed,S–Norwood,D/London 1984](#)

**17...♗xg3 18 ♗xg3**

18 ♗xe5!?! ♗xf1 19 ♗xd6 ♗e3 looks fine for Black.

**18...♗xg3**

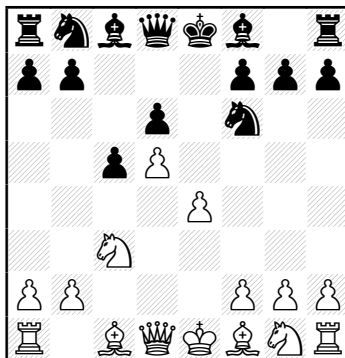
Black has two pawns and some dark-squared control for the piece. Is this enough?:

[Sriram,J–Antonio,R/Calcutta IND 2001.](#)

# Benoni: 6 e4 g6 [A65]

Last updated: 24/12/03 by John Emms

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4



## 6...g6

6...a6!? A rare and interesting move. Black's idea is to play the Benoni, but without allowing the dangerous Flick-Knife Attack which occurs after 6...g6 7 f4 Bg7 8 Bb5+. 7 f4 ♖e7 (7...b5? [Gostisa,L-Rogulj,B/Celje 2003](#)) 8 ♘f3 ♗g4 – avoiding the Flick-Knife (6 e4 a6)

## 7 ♗d3

7 ♘ge2 This is quite an unusual way to meet the Modern Benoni (it's not even mentioned in Psakhis's "The Complete Benoni"). White plans Ne2–g3, Bf1–e2 and eventually f2–f4. 7...♗g7 (7...h5!? 8 ♗g5 [Gurevich,M-Sherbakov,R/Neum BIH 2000.](#)) 8 ♘g3 0-0 9 ♗e2 a6 10 a4 ♖e8 11 0-0 [Ward,C-Corkett,A/St Helier JCI 2002](#)

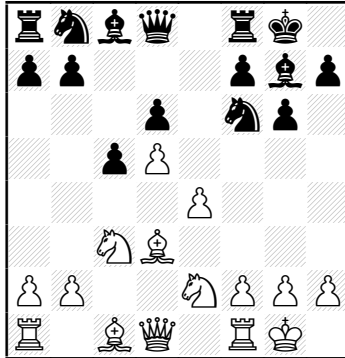
7 f3 ♗g7 8 ♗g5 0-0 9 ♖d2 ♗d7! A very interesting way of mixing up the game. Black has many ideas in this position. For starters he has the usual Queenside pawn majority. His further plan includes...Nb8–a6 and Ra8–b8. Should White ever play a2–a4 the Black Knight slips into b4. 10 ♘ge2 (10 a4 ♘a6 11 ♗c4 ♘b4 Why not? 12 ♘ge2 a6 13 0-0 ♖b8 14 a5∞) 10...♘a6 11 ♘g3 [Rajkovic,D-Martin,A/Haringey 1989.](#)

7 ♗e2 ♗g7 8 ♗f4 This is rather an unusual system from White's point of view, developing both bishops before the g1-knight. I imagine the delay in the knight coming out has



something to do with White trying to avoid lines with an early ...Bg4. 8...0-0 Liang Shuai–Bu Xiangzhi/Qingdao CHN 1999.

7...♙g7 8 ♘ge2 0-0 9 0-0



This system with Bd3 and Nge2 is rather deceptive. On the face of it White's set-up looks quite peaceful, but in reality, White is planning a vicious attack on the kingside with move such as Ng3, Bg5, f4 and e5. One major idea for White is to play e4–e5 and after Black's reply ...dxe5 White pushes with f4–f5!. This pawn sacrifice hems in the Benoni bishop and grants White the use of the e4 square for his knights.

9...♞a6

Black has many ways to play, including 9...a6 and 9...Re8. With 9...Na6 the plan is to play ...Nc7, which discourages White from playing e4–e5, due to the pressure on the d5–pawn. Another point of ...Nc7 is that it supports the pawn lunge ...b7–b5, a vital ingredient in Black's counterplay.

9...a6 10 a4 ♞bd7 Christiansen,L–Bu Xiangzhi/Reykjavik ISL 2000.

10 h3

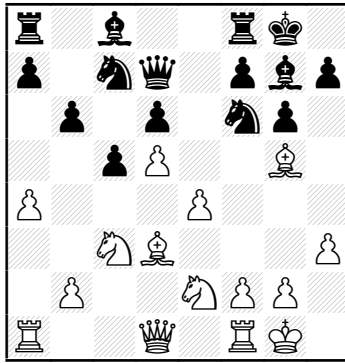
White's plan is clear and deliberate. This move cuts out any tricks involving ...Ng4 or ...Bg4.

10...♞c7 11 a4

11...b6

11...a6 12 ♙g5 ♜b8 13 f4 Knaak,R–Anastasian,A/Yerevan 1988.

12 ♙g5 ♞d7



13 ♖g3

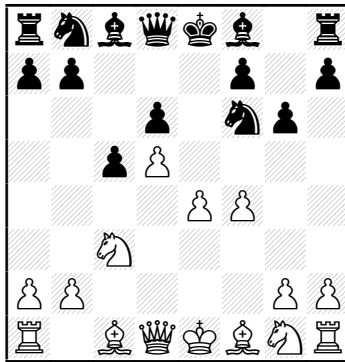
Hoffman,A-Rodi,L/Mar del Plata ARG 2001.

# Benoni: Mikenas Attack – 6 e4 g6 7 f4

## Bg7 8 e5!? [A66]

Last updated: 04/10/02 by John Emms

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4



This is one of White's most aggressive ways of meeting the Modern Benoni.

7...♗g7

7...♕e7!? This possibility, given as a second choice in Watson's 'The Gambit Guide to the Benoni', avoids the complexities of the main line Flick-Knife with 7...Bg7 8 Bb5+, which scores well for White. 8 ♘f3 (8 ♗b5+ can now be safely met with 8...♘bd7) 8...♗g4 (8...♘xe4?? loses to the simple 9 ♕a4+) 9 ♗b5+ [Gaertner,G-Huizer,M/Panormo GRE 2001](#).

8 e5!?

This is the so-called "Mikenas Attack", which is relatively rare these days, especially as everyone seems to be playing the Flick-Knife with 8 Bb5+. Black still has to be careful in the Mikenas, but if he knows what he's doing he should be fine.

8...♘fd7

This is the safest move.

8...dxe5 9 fxe5 ♘fd7 10 e6 fxe6 11 dxe6 used to be considered as clearly better for White but after 11...♖e7! (Tozer,R–Bleis,C/Copenhagen 2001) it's not so clear.

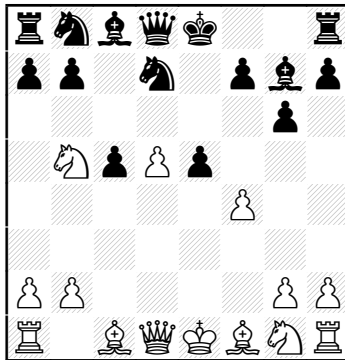
For the very risky 8...dxe5!? see the game Tozer,R–Bleis,C/Copenhagen 2001 (ECO code A66).

## 9 ♘b5

This and 9 Ne4, which transposes to the main text, are the only critical moves.

Black has no problems at all after 9 exd6?! 0-0 for example 10 ♘f3 ♘f6 11 ♗e2 ♖xd6 12 0-0 a6 13 ♘e5 b5 14 a3 ♗b7 15 ♗f3 ♘bd7 16 ♘xd7 ♖xd7 17 ♗e3 ♖ac8 18 ♖c1 ♖fd8 19 ♖f2 ♖e8 20 ♖e2 ♘g4 21 ♘e4 ♘xe3 22 ♖xe3 f5 23 ♘xc5 ♖xc5 24 ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 25 ♖xc5 ♖e3+ 26 ♔f1 ♖xc5 27 ♖e1 ♗xd5 0-1 Methling–Gronde, Koblenz 1992.

## 9...dxe5



## 10 ♘d6+ ♔e7 11 ♘xc8+

11 ♘b5 is possible, but the idea of d6+ and Nc7, to win the rook in the corner, strikes me as far too cheeky, to be any good. 11...♖e8! 12 d6+ ♔f8 13 ♘c7 exf4+: Marjanovic,S–Bednarich,J/Nova Gorica SLO 2000.

For the alternative 11 ♘b5!? see the game Marjanovic,S–Bednarich,J/Nova Gorica 2000 (ECO code A66).

## 11...♖xc8 12 ♘f3 ♖e8 13 fxe5

13 ♗c4 ♔f8 14 0-0 e4 looks fine for Black.

## 13...♘xe5

13...♔f8!? Nakamura,H–De Firmian,N/San Francisco 2002.

**14 ♗b5 ♘bd7 15 0-0 ♖f8 16 ♘xe5 ♙xe5 17 ♗f4**

**17...c4**

For the riskier 17...♙e4 18 ♖f3 f5 see [Grahn,L–El Kher,H/Copenhagen 2002](#).

**18 ♖d4**

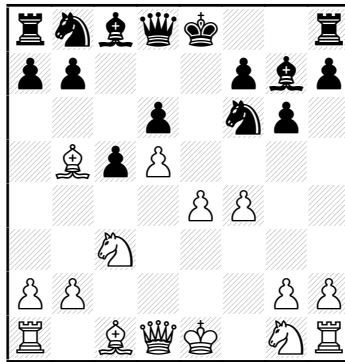
see [Ivanisevic,I–Zhang Zhong/Szeged 1997](#).

# Benoni: Flick–Knife Attack – 8 Bb5+

## Nbd7/Bd7 [A67]

*Last updated: 21/02/04 by John Emms*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♙g7 8 ♙b5+



So-called by Benoni expert and British GM David Norwood, the Flick–Knife Attack (also known as the Taimanov Variation or simply 8 Bb5+) has done more damage to the Modern Benoni than any other system. It's down to the success of the Flick–Knife that many black players now only enter the Modern Benoni via a move order ruling out an early f4 (for example 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5). Nevertheless, although the Flick–Knife is a serious threat to the Benoni, the well-prepared black player can still be rewarded, and the statistics show that all is not a lost cause for the second player. One thing is for certain: This really is a weapon for the bloodthirsty!

**8...♙b5**

Of course this is the move Black really wants to play, but the six million dollar question is: Can he get away with it?

8...♙d7 9 e5 is just good for White: [Ward,C–Quillan,G/British League 2000](#)

**9 e5**

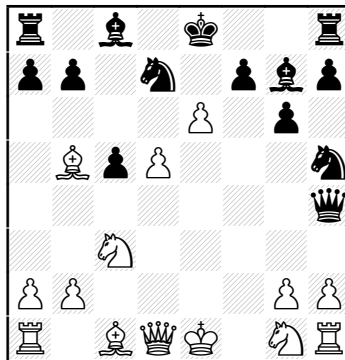
This move is absolutely necessary. Any other move allows Black to castle and the whole point of Bb5+ would be lost.

**9...dxe5 10 fxe5 ♖h5 11 e6**

Once more this is the critical move.

11 ♖f3 11...0-0 12 e6 is not as strong: [Dimitropoulos,G–Anagnostopoulos,I/Patras 2001](#).

**11...♔h4+**



Otherwise Black simply loses a piece for nothing.

11...fxe6 12 dxe6 0-0 13 ♖f3 is very strong for White

**12 g3**

12 ♔d2 fxe6 13 dxe6 0-0 14 exd7 ♕xd7 15 ♕xd7 ♖f2+ (15...♞ad8 16 ♔c2 ♖f2+ 17 ♔b1 [Aleksandrov,A–Wojtkiewicz,A/Wisla 1992](#)) 16 ♖ge2 ♞d8 17 ♞b3+ c4 see [Ivanov,J–Cheparinov,I/Seville 2004](#).

**12...♖xg3 13 hxg3**

13 exd7+?! doesn't look so effective – it makes more sense to keep maintain this pin on the knight as long as possible. 13...♕xd7 14 hxg3 (14 ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 15 hxg3 ♕xc3+ 16 bxc3 ♞he8+ – see [Nussbaumer,F–Molzbichler,A/Feffernitz 2001](#)) 14...♞xh1 15 ♞e2+ (15 ♕xd7+ ♔xd7 16 ♞a4+ ♔d8 – see [Huebner,R–Mandon,F/Aubervilliers 2003](#).) 15...♔f8 16 ♕e3 ♞e8 17 ♔d2 ♕h6 18 ♕xd7 ♖xe3 19 ♞xe3 ♕xe3+ 20 ♔xe3 ♔e7 see [Benoni Flick–Knife: 14 exd7+](#).

**13...♞xh1**

It would be nice for Black if 13...♞xg3+ worked. Indeed after 14 ♔d2 ♕xc3+ 15 bxc3 ♞g2+ 16 ♞e2 ♞xd5+ 17 ♔c2 ♞xe6 18 ♞xe6+ fxe6 Black has four pawns for a piece, which is usually quite a good trade. However, it's now "White's turn to bat"

and following 19 ♗h6 White's bishops are very active and suddenly having the extra piece seems so much more important than those four measly pawns!

### 14 ♗e3!

14 exd7+ transposes to the note to White's 13th move.

### 14...♗xc3+

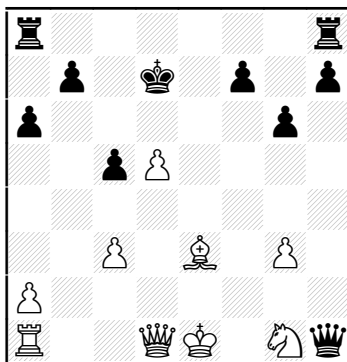
Topalov breathed life into the variation with this idea.

14...0-0 15 exd7 ♗xd7 16 ♗xd7 ♖ac8 17 ♗xc8 ♗xc8 18 ♔d2? [Savchenko,S–Berelovich,A/Zadar CRO 2000](#).

### 15 bxc3 a6

Topalov's move, which gave Black new hope in this variation.

### 16 exd7+ ♗xd7 17 ♗xd7+ ♔xd7



### 18 ♖b3!

This was Sokolov's novelty, although to be honest, I'm sure many players had already discovered the strength of this move. White wants to keep the queens on the board, as then White has more chance of exploiting his extra piece.

Beforehand White had played the somewhat illogical 18 ♖f3 ♖xf3 19 ♗xf3 ♔d6 20 0-0-0 – see [Piceu,T–Stellwagen,D/Vlissingen 2003](#).

### 18...b5 19 0-0-0 ♗he8

### 20 ♗xc5 ♖g2

20...♖ac8 21 ♗d4 [Sokolov,I–Topalov,V/Wijk aan Zee 1996](#).



**21 ♖b1**

21 d6 [Lautier,J–Degraeve,J/Clichy 2001](#).

**21...♗ac8 22 d6 ♗e6**

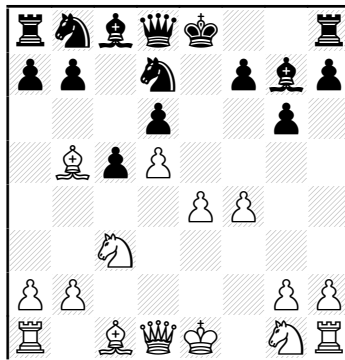
It seems that Black is doing okay here – see [Bromberger,S–Smerdon,D/Goa 2002](#).

# Benoni: Flick-Knife Attack – 8 Bb5+

## Nfd7 [A67]

*Last updated: 29/10/02 by John Emms*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f4 ♗g7 8 ♗b5+ ♘fd7



### 9 a4

It's common knowledge these days that this is clearly the best move. White immediately prevents any expansion plans Black may have on the queenside.

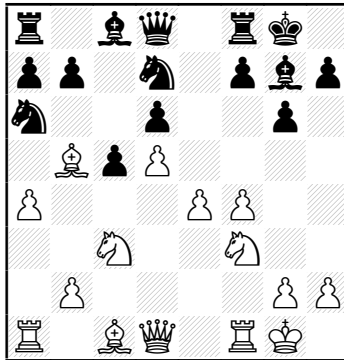
### 9...0-0

9...♘a6 10 ♘f3 ♘b4 11 0-0 a6?! 12 ♗xd7+! ♗xd7 13 f5! is very good for White: [Kasparov,G–Nunn,J/Lucerne Olympiad 1982](#).

9...♗h4+!? A recommendation of John Watson, author of *Gambit Guide to the Modern Benoni*. It will be interesting to see whether 9...Qh4+ continues to collect interest. 10 g3 ♗d8 11 ♘f3 0-0 12 0-0 a6 When Black plays ...Nf6, he will, in effect, be two tempi down on a main line King's Indian Four Pawns Attack. However, the g2–g3 move means that Black has much more scope for his c8–bishop, which is so often Black's problem piece in the Benoni. 13 ♗e2 (13 ♗d3 [Palo,D–De](#)

Firmian,N/Copenhagen DEN 2001 ) 13...♖e8 Van Beek,L–Gofshtein,L/Tel Aviv  
ISR 2001.

**10 ♘f3 ♘a6 11 0-0**



**11...♘c7**

11...♘b4 [Kumaran,D–Howell,J/Plymouth 1992](#).

**12 ♙d3**

12 ♙xd7! Exchanging bishop for knight here is a relatively novel idea. It's fairly basic, but it also looks very strong (it certainly worked for Kasparov albeit in a different position – see Kasparov–Nunn). 12...♙xd7 13 f5! [Houska,M–Tebb,D/Torquay 1998](#).

12 ♖e1 This move is slightly unusual. Normally White retreats the bishop from b5, but here White delays this and vacates the f1-square for the bishop. The rook on e1 supports the push e4–e5, but then again the rook is also well placed on f1. See the game [Bermejo Martinez,J–Oleksienko,M/Peninsula 2002](#).

**12...a6 13 ♙e1**

13 ♙e1 [Lalic,B–Kotsur,P/Lucerne 1997](#).

**13...♖b8**

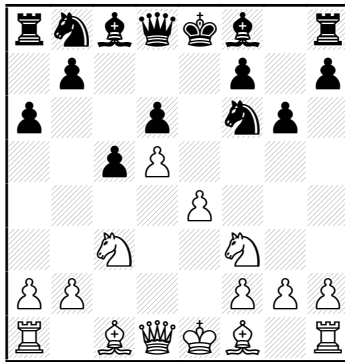
[Ovod,E–Stellwagen,D/Groningen NED 1999](#).

# Benoni: Modern Classical – 7 Nf3 a6!?

## [A70]

*Last updated: 21/02/04 by John Emms*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 a6**

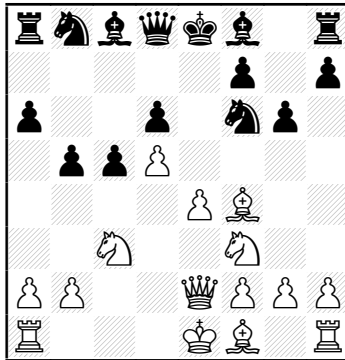


This move has become one of Black's main weapons in recent Modern Benoni history, and it has been very successful. When I first started the site I did a survey of "The Week in Chess", which showed Black to be scoring over 60% with this move. I've done a more recent survey and the figure is still the same. This figure can be explained a little bit by the fact that the average rating of the black players was higher than the average for white players, but even taking this into consideration, it's a very good score for Black. The idea of 7...a6 is to pave the way for an early ...Bg4, thus ruling out the popular and successful Modern Classical variation.

The immediate 7...♗g4 can be met favourably by 8 ♖a4+ ♘bd7 9 ♘d2 when the bishop is looking silly on g4 and is in danger of being trapped.

**8 a4**

8 ♗f4 b5 9 ♖e2



This move disrupts Black's normal development plans. 9...♔c7 (9...♔g7? runs into 10 ♕xd6! ♖xd6 11 e5 for example 11...♗e7 12 d6 ♖e6 13 ♘g5 ♗g4 14 f3 ♗xg5 15 exf6+ ♔f8 16 ♗e7+ ♔g8 17 ♗e8+ ♔f8 18 ♗xc8 and with the h8-rook out of action and the threat of Qb7 looming, White is winning easily.)

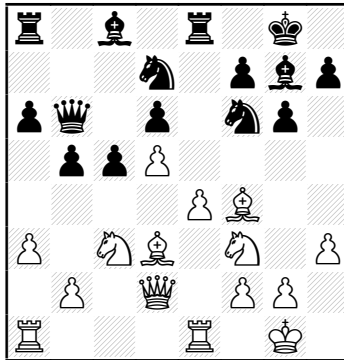
a) 10 e5 is White's most direct try 10...dxe5 11 ♕xe5 ♘bd7 12 ♕g3 (12 0-0-0 ♘xe5 13 ♘xe5 ♖d6 14 ♘c6 Pedersen,H-Emms,J/Esbjerg 1996) 12...0-0 13 d6 ♖e8 14 dxe7 ♗xe7 15 ♘e5 see De Haan,E-Lacroix,B/Belgium 2004.

b) 10 ♗c2 A sensible move, preparing to develop the f1-bishop and castle. This is a favourite of the Russian GM Yuri Yakovich. 10...0-0 11 a4 b4 12 ♘b1 In provoking ...b4 White has given himself access to the c4-square. Black must now play actively or else he will be positionally busted. 12...b3!? Offering the b-pawn in return for White's e-pawn. (12...♘h5 is the main alternative.) 13 ♗xb3 (13 ♗d3!? ♘bd7 14 ♘bd2 ♗b8 15 ♕e2 ♗b4 16 ♘c4 ♘b6 17 ♘fd2 is another way for White to play the position.) 13...♘xe4 14 ♕d3 f5!? The most ambitious move – Black tries to keep the knight on its central outpost. (For the retreat with 14...♘f6 see the game Pert,N-Emms,J/British Championship 2001.) 15 0-0 ♘d7 Khenkin,I-Ward,C/French League 2003.

8 h3 This prevent ...Bg4, but now at least Black can expand on the queenside. 8...b5 9 ♕d3 ♕g7 10 0-0

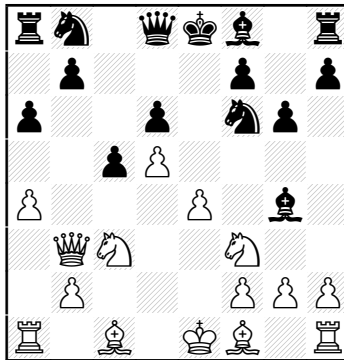
a) 10...c4 I've always liked this move, but my games against Dreev and now Bates have put me off it a bit. I'm sure it's still playable, but I admit there is something to be said about keeping the pawn on c5, where it controls the d4-square. 11 ♕c2 0-0 12 ♕f4 (12 a3 Parker,J-Emms,J/British League 1996.) 12...♖e8 13 ♖e1 ♕b7 14 ♗d2!? Bates,R-Emms,J/NCL 2000.

b) 10...0-0 11 a3 ♖e8 (11...♗a7 12 ♖e1 ♖e7 see Lalic,B-Palliser,R/Port Erin 2002.) 12 ♖e1 ♘bd7 13 ♕f4 ♗b6 14 ♗d2



14...c4 The question is whether Black can play the system without giving away the d4 square with this advance. Black doesn't have to rush to make this move: (14...♙b7 15 ♖ac1 ♜ac8 looks like a reasonable alternative to the text move.) 15 ♙c2 ♙b7 (15...♞c5 16 ♙e3 ♞fd7 Covering the e5-square and thus ruling out any quick e4-e5 thrusts by White. 17 ♖ab1 – see [Istratescu,A-Shariyazdanov,A/Dubai 2002.](#)) 16 ♙e3 ♞c7 17 ♙d4 (17 ♞h2!? [Dreev,A-Emms,J/Hastings 2000.](#)) 17...♜ac8 [Yermolinsky,A-Wedberg,T/New York USA 2000.](#)

8...♙g4 9 ♚b3!?



With this move White attempts to show the weakness of an early ...Bg4.  
 After 9 ♙e2 we are likely to transpose into the ...Bg4 line in the old classical variation (ECO code [A75]), for example 9...♙xf3 10 ♙xf3 ♙g7 (10...♞bd7 11 g4 h6 12 ♙g2 see [Beliavsky,A-Volokitin,A/Copenhagen 2002.](#)) 11 0-0 ♞bd7 (11...0-0 12 ♙d2 [Mikhalevski,A-Marin,M/Andorra 2001.](#)) 12 ♙f4 ♞c7 13 ♖e1 0-0  
 9 h3 [Cooper,J-Emms,J/British League 1998.](#)

9...♙xf3

Protecting the b7-pawn with 9...♖c7 allows White to move his f3-knight. Following 10 ♘d2! the bishop is looking rather silly on g4.

**10 ♖xb7**

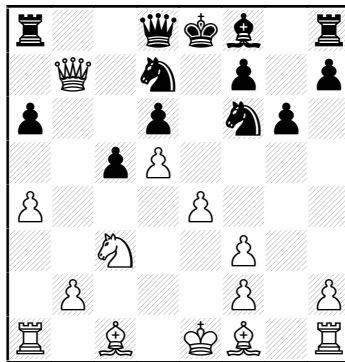
Again the critical move. White grabs a hot pawn. Recapturing on f3 allows Black time to protect b7.

10 gxf3 ♖c7∞

**10...♞bd7**

10...♙xg2!? [Crouch,C–Emms,J/British Championship 2000](#).

**11 gxf3**



**11...♙g7 12 ♙f4**

12 ♖b3?! In many ways it seems like a reasonable ploy to move the queen out of the danger zone, but now Black is free to pursue his counterplay without any distractions.

12...0-0 13 ♖d1 ♞h5 see [Crouch,C–Povah,N/Portsmouth 2003](#).

12 ♖c6 0-0 13 ♖xd6 ♞h5 can be seen in [Papp,G–Hoffmann,M/Budapest 2003](#).

**12...♞b8 13 ♖xa6 ♞h5**

see [Van Wely,L–Topalov,V/Antwerp 1997](#).

# Benoni: Modern Classical – 9 Bd3 a6 and others [A70]

Last updated: 22/02/04 by John Emms

**1 d4**

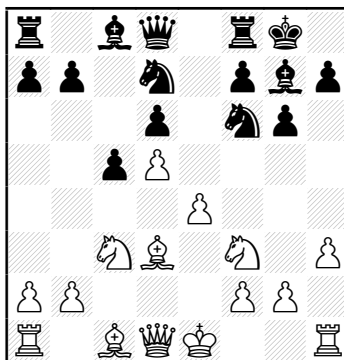
**1...♞f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♞c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♞f3 ♟g7 8 h3**

8 ♟d3 0-0 9 0-0 Nowadays everyone would play 9 h3, preventing the pin and transposing into the Modern Classical Variation. (9 ♞d2 Another way to prevent the ...Bg4 pin. 9...♞e8 10 0-0 a6 11 a4 [Porat,I–Bellaiche,A/Oropesa del Mar ESP 2001](#) ) 9...a6 10 a4 ♟g4! Of course! Black gets rid of the problem bishop. 11 h3 ♟xf3 12 ♞xf3 ♞bd7 13 ♞d1 (13 ♟f4 [Donner,J–Tal,M/ Stockholm 1959.](#)) 13...♞c7 [Hertneck,G–Wedberg,T/Leon ESP 2001.](#)

**8...0-0 9 ♟d3**

9 ♟g5!? [Comas Fabrego,L–Akopian,V/Open, Ubeda ESP 2001.](#)

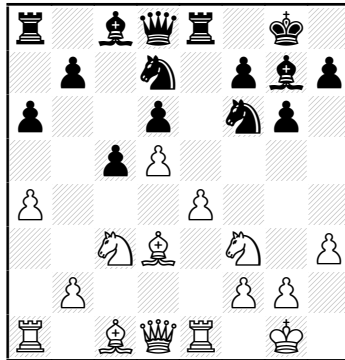
**9...♞bd7**



With this move Black avoids the deeply theoretical lines after 9...b5, hoping to play in a more positional way.



9...a6 10 a4 Naturally White prevents Black from playing the expansive ...b5. 10...♞bd7 (10...♞c7 Khalifman,A–Polgar,J/Hoogeveen NED 2000.) 11 0-0 ♞e8 (11...♞h5 Mohota,N–Ravi,L/Mumbai 2004) 12 ♞e1

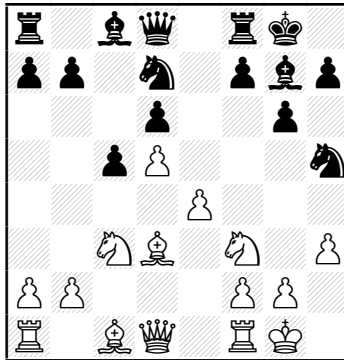


In "Megabase 2000" this position arises 59 times, with Black scoring a less than impressive 35%. (Or 12 ♞f4 ♞c7 13 ♞e1 ♞h5 14 ♞h2 ♞b8 15 ♞d2 – see Borovikov,V–Kononenko,D/Pardubice 2003.) 12...♞e7 (12...♞e5!? Black tries to relieve his position with by forcing an exchange of a pair of knights. In general this is helpful to Black, as he is lacking in space. On the other hand, White gains time by attacking Black's rook. 13 ♞xe5 ♞xe5 14 ♞f4 ♞e8 Palac,M–Feletar,D/Bizovac CRO 2000.) 13 ♞f4! Hitting d6 and preparing a possible e4–e5 advance. 13...♞h5 14 ♞h2 14 Bg5 is also possible but it makes more sense to keep some pressure on the vulnerable d6–pawn. 14...♞e5 15 ♞e2! Causing the knight on h5 some problems. (Less effective is 15 ♞xe5 ♞xe5) 15...♞xf3+ (For 15...♞d7 see Bacrot,E–Galego,L/Andorra 1998.) 16 ♞xf3 Marfia,J–Rotkop/Correspondence 2002.

9...♞d7!? This is an interesting alternative to both 9...b5 and 9...a6. The bishop looks a bit funny on d7, but it does prepare ...b7–b5, and if White decides to prevent this with 10 a4, then Black can follow up with ...Nb8–a6–b4: Mohandesi,S–Degraeve,J/Cappelle La Grande FRA 2000.

9...♞e8 Horvath,J–Horvath,C/Bischwiller 1993.

## 10 0-0 ♞h5



As recommended by John Watson in his book "The Gambit Guide to the Modern Benoni".  
Black takes measures to prevent Bf4.

**11 ♖g5**

11 ♖e3 a6 12 a4 ♜e8 (*12...b6 Akobian,V–Langer,M/Los Angeles USA 2001.*) 13 ♛d2 ♜b8  
*Shengelia,D–Ehlvest,J/Batumi 2002.*

**11...♜f6 12 ♖e3 a6**

12...♜e8 13 ♛d2 ♞e5 14 ♞xe5 ♖xe5 *Shulman,Y–Langer,M/Las Vegas 2002*

**13 a4 ♜e8 14 g4**

Very direct. White hopes that Black's minor pieces on the kingside will be misplaced.  
14 ♞d2 b6 see *Arlandi,E–Reinderman,D/Ohrid 2001*

**14...♞g7**

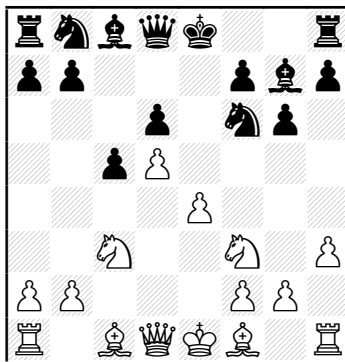
see *Ljubojevic,L–Topalov,V/Monte Carlo 2003.*

# Benoni: Modern Classical – 9 Bd3 b5 10

## Bxb5 [A70]

*Last updated: 29/06/02 by John Emms*

**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 ♙g7 8 h3**



Over the last decade the Modern Classical has become the most popular and successful weapon against the Modern Benoni. More positional in nature than the Flick–Knife, the Modern Classical still carries a big punch. Restraint is the name of the game. White overprotects the e4–pawn, keeps the c8–bishop out of the game with an early h2–h3 and normally prevents Black from playing the ...b7–b5 lunge.

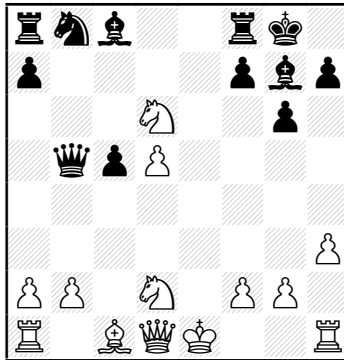
**8...0-0 9 ♙d3 b5**

As quieter lines tend to lead to a small, but niggling edge for White, black players have turned their attention onto this critical pawn lunge. It can be captured in two different ways, but both give Black some counterplay.

**10 ♙xb5**

The quieter choice, after which White hopes to keep a small, but enduring advantage.

**10...♘xe4 11 ♘xe4 ♙a5+ 12 ♘fd2 ♙xb5 13 ♘xd6**



So White regains the pawn advantage, but Black keeps a lead in development. Is this lead enough? Well Black can use the time which White needs to complete his development by planning an attack on White's passed d-pawn. If this can be captured then Black's problems are generally over. Otherwise, White can look forward to a pleasant advantage.

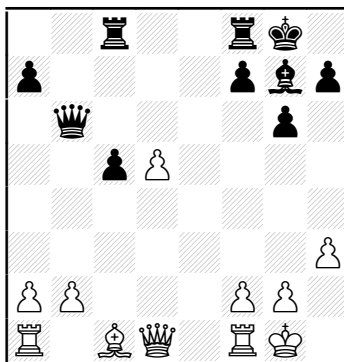
**13...Qa6 14 N2c4 Nd7**

14...Rd8 This is a tricky move order. 15 Qf4 Nd7 (15...Rxd6?! is dubious: [Breier,A-Van Blitterswijk,S/Groningen 1999.](#)) 16 0-0 Nb6 17 Nxb6

a) 17...Qxb6 18 Nxc8 Rxc8 19 Rb1 transposes to the main line.(19 d6!? is interesting: [Estremera Panos,S-Serra Olives,T/Andorra 2000](#) )

b) 17...axb6!? [Wu Shaobin-Papaioannou,I/Istanbul TUR 2000.](#)

**15 0-0 Nb6 16 Nxb6 Qxb6 17 Nxc8 Rxc8**



**18 Rb1**

The normal move. White protects the b–pawn before moving the c1-bishop. 18 Rb1 is the move most likely to cause Black the most problems.

18 ♖g5!? White plays ambitiously, giving up his pawn advantage to ensure that Black cannot attack the important d5–pawn with ...Rd8. I must admit I'm not convinced by the idea. I suspect that Black can equalise with careful play. 18...♙xb2 19 ♗f3 ♗e5 20 ♕f4 see [Krasenkow,M–Lagowski,P/Warsaw 2002](#).

18 ♖e1 ♕d4 (18...♗fd8 19 ♕f4 ♗b7 [Seres,L–Vajda,S/Budapest 2001](#)) 19 ♗f3 c4 20 ♕h6 [Krasenkow,M–Velicka,P/Batumi 2002](#).

### 18...♗fd8!

Again the most natural move. The d–pawn must be attacked.

### 19 ♕f4 ♗b7!

This was the invention of the Bulgarian Grandmaster Veselin Topalov, who used it to secure a draw against Karpov.

19...c4 20 d6! ♗d7 21 ♗a4 ♗c6 22 ♗be1 and again the d–pawn is very annoying for Black, Rogozenko–Moldovan, Romania 1995.

### 20 d6 ♕f8 21 ♗d3!?

21 Qd3 is an improvement over the earlier 21 Qd2. The very subtle point is that the queen can swing over to a3 and attack the a7–pawn!

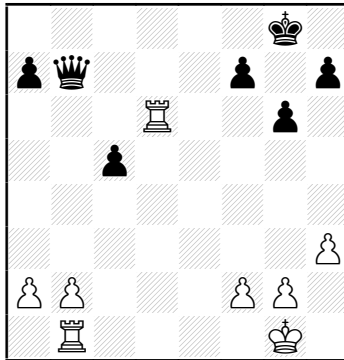
21 ♗d2 21...♕xd6 22 ♕xd6 ♗c6 23 ♗fd1 ♗a6 24 ♗g5 ♗xd6 25 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 26 ♗xc5 ♗xa2=

### 21...♕xd6! 22 ♕xd6 ♗c6

### 23 ♗fd1 ♗cxd6!?

23...♗d7!? 24 ♗a3 The point of the 21st move. The a7–pawn is bagged. 24...♗xd6 25 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 26 ♗xa7 ♗e8 27 ♗a5 ♗e2 28 ♗c3 28...♗b6! (28...♗d5?! : [Ionov–Belorovich, St.Petersburg 1999](#)) 29 a4 [Piket,J–Topalov,V/Monaco \(blind\) 2000](#).

### 24 ♗xd6 ♗xd6 25 ♗xd6



Of course White's two rooks are worth slightly more than Black's queen, but in practice Black has been able to hold these positions, despite their rather uncomfortable nature.

**25...c4 26 ♖d2**

Again the normal move, although now Black can solve the weakness of his c–pawn by exchanging it.

26 ♖dd1!? ♕b4 27 ♖dc1 keeping the c–pawn on the board.

**26...c3 27 ♖c2 ♕e4 28 ♖bc1 cxb2 29 ♖xb2**

This position has been reached a few times, and the general consensus is that White is a little bit better. Whether this advantage is enough for a win is another matter. Nevertheless, it's clear that Black is in for a long defensive job.

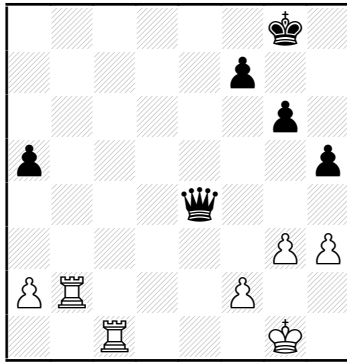
**29...h5!**

Planning to push the pawn to h4, which would help Black in any perpetual check attempts.

**30 g3!?**

30 ♖bc2 Babula,V–Velicka,P/Ostrava CZE 2000.

**30...a5**



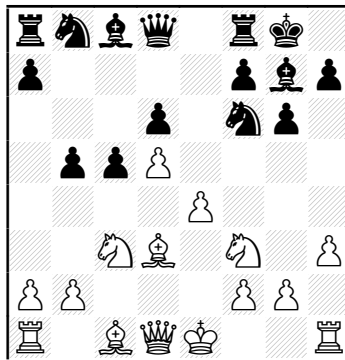
Shipov,S-Velimirovic,D/Belgrade 1998.

# Benoni: Modern Classical – 9 Bd3 b5 10

## Nxb5 [A70]

*Last updated: 19/03/04 by John Emms*

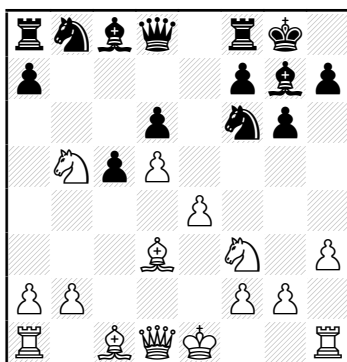
1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 h3 0-0 9  
♗d3 b5



This pawn sacrifice is the most aggressive way of meeting the Modern Classical, but in recent times Black has been looking for different solutions. This is probably because in the 'absolute main line' following 10 Bxb5 Black must fight hard for the draw and, more importantly, there is absolutely no chance of winning unless White makes a horrendous mistake.

10 ♘xb5





This is much more ambitious than 10 Bxb5. White hopes to achieve a bigger advantage, but of course there are more risks.

### 10...Re8

Originally Black's idea had been 10...Nxe4 11 Qxe4 Re8 but Chernin's discovery of 12 Ng5! has virtually laid this to rest, for example 12...h6 (12...Qf6 13 0-0 a6 14 Ne6 see [Lautier,J–Vaisser,A/Val d'Isere 2002](#)) 13 Ne6! Qa5+ 14 Nc3 Qxc3+ 15 bxc3 Wxc3+ 16 Qd2 and Black is clearly suffering. 10...Re8 is a major refinement in Black's play, which makes the line playable once more.

### 11 0-0

This is the normal move, and certainly much safer than 11 Nd2!?. White immediately gives back the pawn, hoping to exploit the activity of his own pieces.

11 Nd2 With this move White is hoping to keep his pawn advantage, but there are massive complications ahead. 11...Nxe4! Black has to try to get this move to work otherwise he is simply a pawn down with no compensation. 12 Qxc4 Qa6 13 a4 Qa5 [Van Wely,L–Topalov,V/Wijk aan Zee 1998](#). (13...f5? cannot be recommended – see [Graf,A–Ghaem Maghami,E/Moscow 2004](#))

### 11...Nxe4 12 Qa4!?

12 Re1 and 12 Bxe4 are also possible, but this is the latest wrinkle in White's play. The queen puts pressure on the knight on e4, while also protecting the knight on b5.

### 12...a6!?

This is more flexible than 11...Bd7. The point is that on certain occasions Black wishes to leave d7 free for the knight.

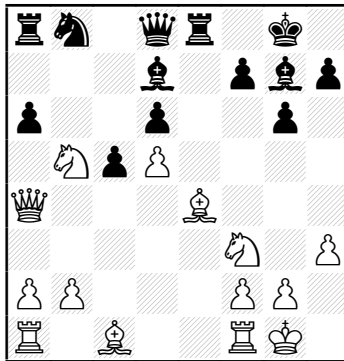
12...Qd7 [Avrukh,B–Rotstein,A/Tel Aviv 1997](#).

### 13 Qxe4

After

13 ♖e1 Black can play 13...Bd7, or perhaps the stronger move 13...♘d7! (Topalov) which has been scoring reasonably well for Black. For example 14 ♜xe4 ♜xe4 15 ♚xe4 ♘f6 16 ♚e2 axb5 17 ♘xb5 ♘b7 18 ♘g5 ♘xd5 and Black had no problems at all in Avrukh–Pigusov, Linares 1997.

**13...♘d7**



The point: Black pins the knight to the queen and regains his piece.

**14 ♘d3 ♚b6 15 ♘g5**

15 ♚h4? is not a good move – see [Shabalov,A–Womacka,M/Bad Wiessee 2002](#).

**15...axb5 16 ♚h4 h6 17 ♘e4 ♚d8:**

[Hegeler,F–Pajeken,W/Hamburg 1998](#).

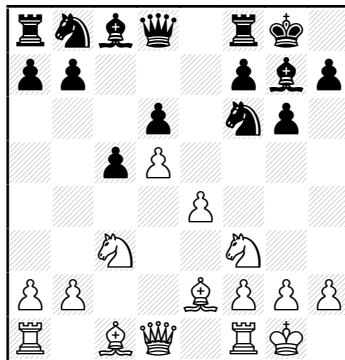
# Benoni: Old Classical – 9...Na6 and others [A73]

*Last updated: 14/03/03 by John Emms*

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4**

6 Nf3 g6 7 Nd2 This is the first move of the "Knight's Tour Variation", but here White simply aims to play the Old Classical Variation, but without allowing Black the idea of ...Bg4. 7...Bg7 8 e4 0-0 9 Qc2 Na6 10 0-0 Nc7 is a more modern way of reaching the position after move 10.

**6...g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 Qc2 0-0 9 0-0**



**9...Na6**

9...Bg4 Lines involving ...Bg4 in the Old Classical Variation are very respectable from Black's point of view: [Crut,A–Halkias,S/Patras GRE 1999](#)

**10 Nd2 Nc7**

This is a common move in the Old Classical. Black's knight will travel to c7, where it supports the usual ...b7–b5 thrust.

## 11 a4

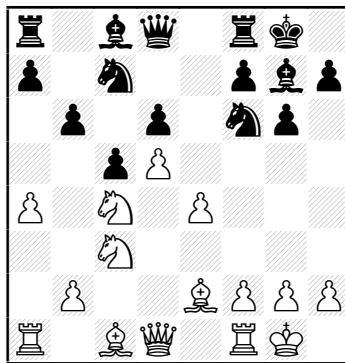
Taking steps against ...b7–b5.

11 f3 supporting the e4–pawn: [Kelecevic,N–Burgermeister,P/Lenk SUI 2000](#).

## 11...b6

Another common idea for Black. The plan is to answer Nc4 with ...Ba6, and then to exchange the bishop for the knight. Thus this has many similarities with the ...Bc8–g4xf3 plan.

## 12 ♖c4



12 ♜b1 is another prophylactic idea: [Gulko,B–Emms,J/Esbjerg 2000](#).

12 ♘h1!? is a semi–waiting move: [Van der Sterren,P–Emms,J/Bundesliga 1995](#).

## 12...♗a6 13 ♗g5

For 13 ♘a3 see [Almond,R–Ward,C/Jersey 2003](#)

## 13...♗xc4

Black should probably wait a little bit before capturing on c4. Theory considers 13...♞d7 to be Black's best move, for example 14 b3 (14 f3 is equal according to ECO) 14...♞fe8 15 ♞c2?! ♗xc4! 16 bxc4 ♘xc4! 17 ♘xe4 ♞f5 18 ♗d3 ♗xa1 19 ♘xd6! ♞xg5 20 ♘xe8 ♘xe8! 21 ♞xa1 ♞e5 22 ♞c1 ♘d6 and if anything Black is a little better, [Dlugy,M–Suba,M/New York 1987](#).

## 14 ♗xc4 h6 15 ♗h4

[Biolek,R–Sikorova,O/High Tatras SVK 2001](#).

# Benoni: Old Classical – 9...a6 10 a4 Bg4

[A75]

Last updated: 24/12/03 by John Emms

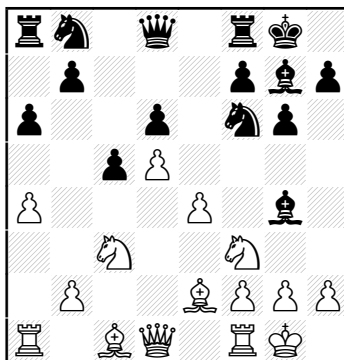
**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 ♙g7**

7...a6 8 a4 ♙g4 is the modern move order chosen by black players to reach ...Bg4 lines, as this avoids the Modern Classical with 8 h3.

**8 ♙e2**

8 h3 gives us the Modern Classical Variation (see code [A70]).

**8...0-0 9 0-0 a6 10 a4 ♙g4**



**11 ♙f4 ♙xf3**

11...♞e8 This used to be the main move. After this White can offer his bishop for an exchange instead. 12 ♘d2! 12...♙xe2 13 ♜xe2 ♘h5 14 ♙c3 ♘d7 15 g4 The most aggressive move. (For 15 a5 see [Browne,W–de Firmian,N/USA \(ch\) 1985](#)) 15...♘hf6 a) 16 f3 may be more testing: 16...h6 17 ♔h1 ♘e5 and now 18 g5! (18 ♞g1 b5!? was unclear in Portisch–Kasparov, Moscow 1981.) 18...hxg5 19 ♙xg5 ♜c7 20 f4 gives White a strong initiative

b) 16 a5 h5 with an unclear position – see [Tosic,M–Brenjo,S/Leskovac YUG 2002](#)  
11...♘h5 12 ♙g5 ♙f6 13 ♙d2 [Akhmetov,A–Bu Xiangzhi/Moscow RUS 2002](#).

**12 ♙xf3 ♚e7**

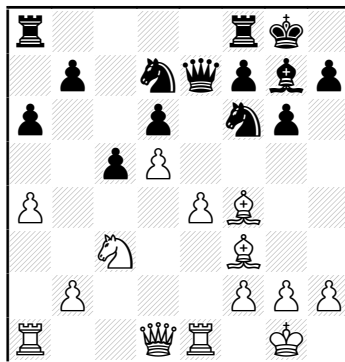
We've reached a fairly normal Benoni position, and one in which Black can feel quite comfortable. By exchanging his problem c8–bishop for a knight, he now has more space in which to move his remaining pieces.

12...♘e8!? [Dorfman,J–Degraeve,J/Marsailles FRA 2001](#).

**13 ♜e1**

13 ♞b3!? An interesting idea, presenting Black with a problem on how to develop the b8–knight. 13...♘bd7!? [Alonso,S–Topalov,V/Villarrobledo ESP 2000](#).

**13...♘bd7**



This position has been witnessed many times before, with Black's results being very respectable.

**14 ♞d2**

14 h3 ♜fe8 15 ♞c2 (15 ♞d2 keeping an eye on the dark squares, is more normal) 15...h5!?  
Black plans a route for his knight, which will go to h7 and possibly g5. Meanwhile, the "Benoni bishop" will be unleashed: [Aung Aung–Pigusov,E/Shanghai CHN 2000](#)

**14...♜fe8 15 a5 ♜ac8**

15...h5 see [Henrichsen,J–Emms,J/Copenhagen 1993](#)

**16 ♘a4 h5 17 ♜ac1 ♘h7**

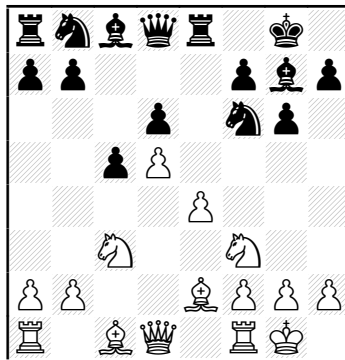
is [Kozul,Z–Cebalo,M/Celje 2003](#).

# Benoni: Old Classical – 9...Re8 10 Nd2

## Nbd7 [A77]

Last updated: 14/01/02 by John Emms

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 ♗g7 8 ♕e2 0-0  
9 0-0 ♝e8



### 10 ♘d2 ♘bd7

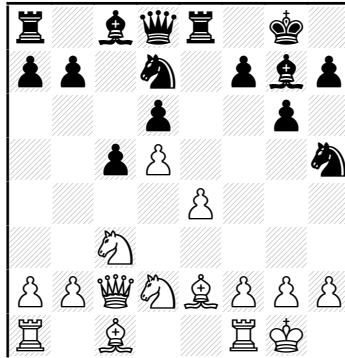
10...Na6 is the main alternative (see ECO code [A78–79]).

This line was popular in the seventies and eighties, but Black players don't really trust it any more, so it's not seen around so much these days. The problem for Black is that the only useful square for the d7-knight is on e5, but here it can be kicked back by a timely f2–f4.

10...a6 11 a4 ♘bd7 12 ♖c2 ♘e5 13 f4? An instructive mistake, which catches quite a few players out. White's position is not quite ready for this advance. White should build up more slowly with 13 h3, 13 b3 or 13 Ra3!?, patrolling the third rank. (13 ♝a3 ♖e7 14 a5 ♜b8 15 ♘a4 ♗d7 16 f4 ♗xa4 17 ♖xa4 with a slight plus for White, Bukic–Velimerovic, Borovo 1981) 13...♘eg4 Naturally. Black now threatens ...Ne3 14 ♘c4 14...♘xe4! This sacrifice leads to a sustained attack on the kingside. 15 ♘xe4 15...♗d4+ 16 ♘f2 (16 ♖h1 ♘xh2! is also very strong for Black: Kahn–Parkanyi, Budapest 2000 ) 16...♗f5 and White is in trouble: Rakhmangulov,A–Smetankin,S/Rovno 2000.

## 11 a4

11 ♔c2 ♖h5!?

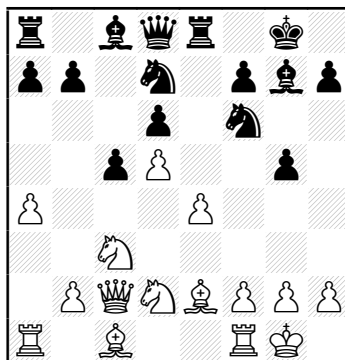


This idea caused shockwaves around the world when Fischer unleashed it at Reykjavik. Black allows his kingside pawns to be shattered, hopeful that the activity he gains will compensate for this: [Spassky,B–Fischer,R/Reykjavik 1972](#)  
11 h3 11...g5 [Langeweg,K–Psakhis,L/Sarajevo 1981](#).

## 11...g5!?

which supports the knight on e5, but on the other hand is obviously quite risky due to the weaknesses it leaves in the Black camp, the f5-square for example. It should be pointed out that often Black plays 11...Ne5 12 Qc2 and then 12...g5, but this is just a move order wrinkle, and generally one line transposes to the other.

## 12 ♔c2



[Portisch,L–Suba,M/Tunis 1985](#).



# Benoni: Old Classical – 9...Re8 10 Nd2

## Na6 [A78]

*Last updated: 14/01/02 by John Emms*

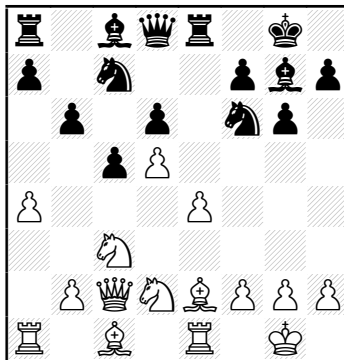
**1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 ♙g7 8 ♙e2 0-0  
9 0-0 ♚e8 10 ♘d2 ♘a6**

Planning ...Nc7 and possibly ...b7–b5.

**11 ♚e1**

The super-solid 11 f3 is the most popular move nowadays (see ECO code [A79]).

**11...♘c7 12 a4 b6 13 ♚c2**



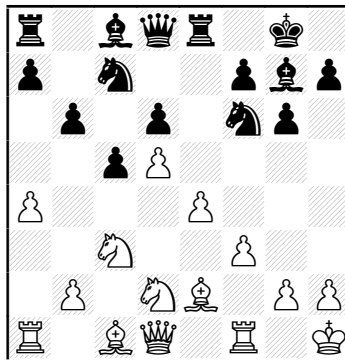
Gurgenidze,B–Tal,M/Moscow 1957.

# Benoni: Old Classical – 9...Re8 10 Nd2

## Na6 11 f3 [A79]

*Last updated: 14/01/02 by John Emms*

1 d4 ♘f6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 ♘c3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 ♘f3 ♙g7 8 ♙e2 0-0  
9 0-0 ♜e8 10 ♘d2 ♘a6 11 f3 ♘c7 12 a4 b6 13 ♙h1



In my opinion this line is slightly favourable to White.

13...♜b8 14 ♘c4 ♙a6 15 ♙g5 ♙d7 16 ♜e1 ♙xc4 17 ♙xc4 a6 18 ♙f1 ♜b7

18...h6 Van der Sterren–Emms, Bundesliga 1995/6

19 ♙d2 b5

Ivanov,S–Nedev,T/Paide EST 1999.